



# THINKING AHEAD

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The Newsletter of Vision Ministries Canada

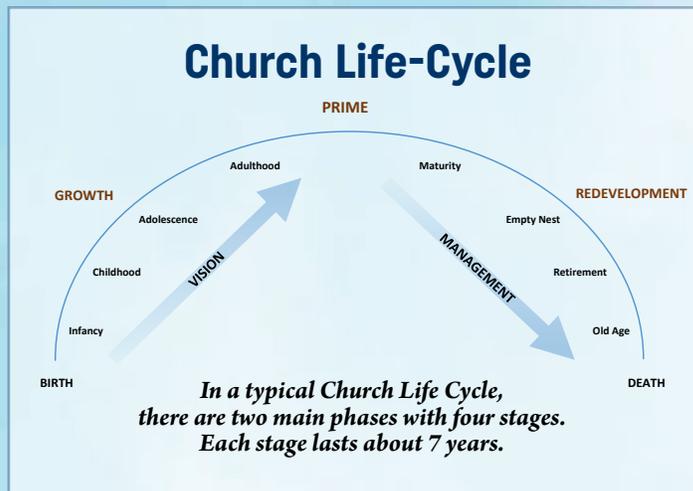
*There is a time for everything... a time to be born and a time to die* – Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

## Vitality at Every Stage: The Church Life Cycle

BY MIKE STONE

Like human beings, churches are born, they grow through childhood and adolescence to maturity, and then if not renewed, they decline and finally die. I began pastoring ForestView Church in Oakville, Ontario during its infancy when the founding vision was still fresh among the core group of about 100. During my 19 years at the church, the congregation developed through adolescence and into early adulthood.

Being aware of these life stages can enhance our ability to enjoy and make the best of each stage of our church's journey. Even acknowledging impending death will increase the likelihood of establishing a



legacy before the lights go out.

As congregations transition from one stage to the next, there is always an opportunity for renewal. Seasoned church consultant, George Bullard has been using the life-cycle

concept to help congregations revitalize for the last four decades. A couple of years ago, I spent four days with George in his home in Columbia, SC and am grateful for the insights that he shared regarding this framework.

There are two major phases in the life of a congregation—a period of growth and a period of redevelopment (decline). On average, the growth phase lasts for 21-28 years. The growth phase is divided into four stages each lasting about seven years—infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The length of these stages may correspond to the seven or eight years required for complete culture change—whether the internal culture of a church or the broader context in which the church pursues mission.

The timeline for the redevelopment phase is less precise, as decline is often paused by periods of renewal and revitalization. The redevelopment phase also includes four stages: maturity, empty nest, retirement, and old age, followed by death.

The main difference between the growth and redevelopment phases of the church life-cycle is the driving presence of vision. In flourishing congregations,

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*Fledgling 1401 Church is shining the light of Christ in the Delta neighbourhood of Hamilton in a building left behind by an Anglican congregation that ceased meeting in 2006. On December 16th, 100+ family, friends and neighbours attended a candlelight service.*

# 1401 Church: A Family on Mission

BY SANDRA REIMER

Church planters Will and Leanne MacLaughlin belong to a family on mission. Along with four other families, they began participating in what God is doing in the Delta neighbourhood of Hamilton, Ontario in September 2018 through a VMC-supported church plant called 1401. “We feel God’s asked us to be present in our neighbourhood and to take it on as a parish—so we invest in that community and serve it well,” says Will. They are in it for the “long haul” and are not expecting instant results. As they have intentionally built relationships with people who don’t yet know Jesus, neighbours are opening up to honest discussions and asking for prayer.

The fledgling church plant meets in the 99-year-old building of former Grace Anglican Church at 1401 King St. in Hamilton. The building features a large stained-glass window depicting Jesus and the words “And if I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me.” Will says, “That’s our vision—to lift Jesus high and point our community to Him.”

Each Sunday, the families and some of their neighbours meet from 4:30 to 6 pm. Gatherings always include a meal—this is a key value of 1401 and their mother church St. Clair—to eat together. “We chat and share a meal together then discuss something God’s

laid on our hearts.” Children are present and welcome at these meetings. “We try to aim the teaching at the children and in the last 30 minutes we let them go and play while we go a little deeper with discussion and pray for each other.” Sometimes it’s a bit chaotic if the kids are loud or need something. The men and women take turns meeting on a Sunday night without the kids so that they have some uninterrupted time together. Currently, they are discussing finding work/life balance in the adult groups.

On Monday mornings, children and mothers hang out together at the church. They have also run CAP Money Courses to help them focus their finances. “Now we’re looking at Ken Shigamatsu’s, *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* to posture our hearts to find a rhythm of rest and work ourselves.” Many of their neighbours are affluent and struggle to live a balanced life. “Together we want to learn a rhythm of life that will demonstrate Jesus’ light and easy yoke to our neighbours who feel worn out and burdened.”

A primary focus for the families is to build relationships while they live their ordinary lives—taking children to school, going to the coffee shop, walking in the neighbourhood etc. They want to be obedient to God as he opens doors in conversations with their friends. “We want

to be mindful to take it beyond, ‘Hey we’re a lovely group of people who will love and care for you.’ Will says that sometimes Christians may fear pressuring people or damaging the relationship if they talk about Jesus. God has been prompting people around the 1401 families to ask questions. “Pray for us that we would have the courage to step into these opportunities.” The young congregation is motivated by God’s heart for their neighbours. “He says to us, ‘Hey I am working in this person’s life, they just don’t know it yet. Will you help them on their journey? I really want to be a part their lives.’” The MacLaughlins, and the other core families, have said yes to this call.

At under 1 year old, the church is still small. However, on December 24th they held a Christmas carol service and invited friends and the wider community. That special night, 120 people “acknowledged that Jesus came to give us hope,” including neighbours with whom the founding families have been connecting. For the first time, since the Grace Anglican congregation stopped meeting in this building in 2006, the church was full. “At this service, God gave us a snapshot of what the future can look like in 10 years,” says Will. He is conscious of the prayers of past generations of Christians who have shone the light of Christ in this neighbourhood and is happy to pick up the torch. ■

# St. Clair Church Births 1401

BY SANDRA REIMER

“When we started St. Clair we always felt that we wanted to be a church that plants churches,” says Matt Pamplin, founder and pastor of 5-year-old St. Clair Church in Hamilton, the mother church of 1401. “We have always believed, due to some of our reading and influences, that we need to make disciples of Jesus and that churches will follow.” Matt refers to author Mike Breen’s principle when he says, “But if we start with a church we might not always get disciples.”

A couple of years ago, leaders at St. Clair began praying about next steps. “We went with pretty open hearts and a blank sheet of paper,” says Matt. “We knew God had called us to plant, but we didn’t want to assume it would be ‘St. Clair 2.0.’ They didn’t know where the church would be planted or what form it would take but they sensed God saying to lay down the way they planted churches. “We also felt that church planting didn’t just look like getting a

building, a brilliant sound system, and a smoke machine and trying to attract people to it.” Instead, Matt and St. Clair church feel called to be a family on mission. “We listen to our community well, build relationships, and share the good news of Jesus. Then as people come to faith in Jesus, we disciple them and then a community is formed.”

Rather than focusing on growing the mother church to a certain number, St. Clair’s vision is to “plant healthy churches throughout our city and beyond.” They believe in making disciples in a geographic area and then seeing what God does. “We had a real sense that the Holy Spirit was at work in a specific neighbourhood in our city.” After much prayer and discussion with Will and Leanne MacLaughlin, they decided to launch 1401 in the Delta neighbourhood of Hamilton. Vision Ministries Canada supports 1401 with seed funding and mentorship.

*Matt Pamplin will be teaching at Vision Ministries Canada’s Regional Events this Spring. See details on page 6. ■*

**1401 Church meets in a former Anglican church that is located in Hamilton, Ontario a few neighbourhoods away from the mother congregation St. Clair Community Church.**



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Spending of funds received by VMC is confined to board approved programs and purchases. Each gift designated toward an approved program will be used as designated with the understanding that when any given need has been met, designated gifts will be used where needed most. Gifts of \$20 or more are acknowledged with an official tax receipt.

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*In February 2018 in Paris, France VMC hosted an international gathering of national church network leaders, representing 18 different countries. Peer learning and support continue among these leaders of churches with a historic Plymouth or Christian Brethren connection.*



# VMC Annual Report: 2018

Every member of our team finds their work deeply gratifying, knowing that the Spirit animates our actions to help churches multiply and revitalize in hopes that more people become followers of Jesus. It's a privilege to serve alongside pastors, planters and other ministry leaders, mostly across Canada, offering encouragement, support and guidance to those on the missional frontline. Thanks to the many friends and partners who support us with prayer, finances and volunteer service. We are grateful that God has drawn you into this great work with us.

## Comments on the Financial Summary:

### For the fiscal year ending June 30th, 2018:

- VMC continues to face revenue challenges, showing a deficit of \$121,696 in operations (though we believe that God had provided for our leadership transition years through the gift of a building in 2016)
- More than 21% (\$25,998) of this deficit pertains to amortization costs, an "accounting expense" that does not represent actual spending

- We reduced operational expenses by 4.4% (\$29,432), including a 9% reduction in payroll (\$42,000)
- An 7% increase in office and administration expense (\$6,704) can be attributed to the purchase of a new online accounting system and increased accounting fees
- In light of VMC's 25th anniversary preaching tour (100+ churches) and related national promotional tour (8 cities), an 8% increase in travel expense suggests costs in this area are under control

### In the first six months of the current fiscal year (July-Dec 2018):

- We've launched two initiatives aimed at increasing revenue:
  - the revision of our partnership agreement with churches
  - a matching fund campaign to establish new giving from individuals
- Net revenue from operations for the first six months of this fiscal year (Jul-Dec 2018) is \$62,000 above budget

- (~140%) and \$131,000 (209%) better than the same period in the previous year
- Donation revenue for the month of December was \$178,842 exceeding last year by \$44,106 ( 33%)
- We sold a half million dollar property at the end of 2018, not only improving our cash position but eliminating the related amortization (\$26,000) going forward, and providing resources for continued church planting

# 2018 Ministry Highlights:

- VMC helped to plant 10 new churches and strengthened 60 different churches through coaching and consulting support

- With a focus on urban planting, VMC supported church start-ups in three global cities—Toronto (2), Montreal (1) and Calgary (1)

- Fresh openness to the gospel is stirring among immigrant communities, particularly in our Ethiopian/Eritrean and Persian networks; we supported VMC’s first church among Sikhs and Hindus

- In its sixth year, our MMF National Partnership funded their 18th and 19th church plants (plus 4 planting related projects); planting grants provided from these 15 churches now total \$322,000

- We provided banking, accounting and receipting support for 18 infant churches

- VMC worked with several church planting “umbrella” agencies—C2C, New Leaf and Church Planting Canada (Mike Stone now serves on the CPC executive) in cooperation with other national networks and denominations

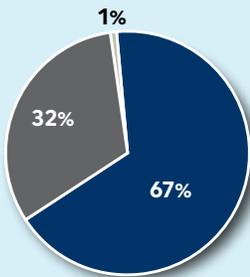
- Our 15th regional church network is being formed in the Ottawa region

- 200+ leaders attended Thinking Shrewdly; missiologist Alan Hirsch explored the gospel and proclamation for our shifting culture

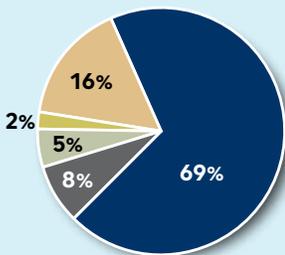
- A VMC team encouraged and equipped pastors in Kenya; Vision Ministries Kenya was energized by development of a new leadership core

- We hired a Director of Operations (Rebecca Cummings) and an Accounting & Payroll Analyst (Cathy Zhang)

As of June 30, 2018  
Revenue



Expenses



## VMC Fund

### Revenue

- General contributions
- Conference, event fees and other
- Investment income (loss)

**Total VMC fund revenue**

	2018	2017
General contributions	347,570	384,039
Conference, event fees and other	165,412	146,946
Investment income (loss)	5,553	27,695
<b>Total VMC fund revenue</b>	<b>518,535</b>	<b>558,680</b>

### Expenses

- Salaries and benefits
- Travel
- Leadership development and conferences
- Newsletter “Thinking Ahead”
- Administrative and office expenses

**Total VMC fund expenses**

**Excess of revenue over expenses**

	2018	2017
Salaries and benefits	442,542	484,746
Travel	52,814	48,966
Leadership development and conferences	32,128	31,214
Newsletter “Thinking Ahead”	13,881	12,575
Administrative and office expenses	98,866	92,162
<b>Total VMC fund expenses</b>	<b>640,231</b>	<b>669,663</b>
<b>Excess of revenue over expenses</b>	<b>-121,696</b>	<b>-110,983</b>

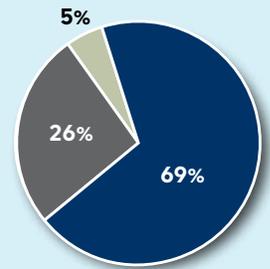
### Project Funds

- VMC Church Plants
- Vision Ministries Kenya

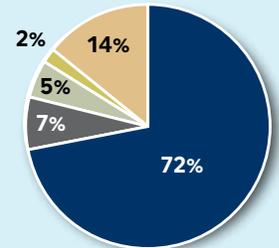
**Total VMC project funds disbursed**

	2018	2017
VMC Church Plants	1,820,969	1,789,140
Vision Ministries Kenya	78,293	41,915
<b>Total VMC project funds disbursed</b>	<b>1,899,262</b>	<b>1,831,055</b>

As of June 30, 2017  
Revenue



Expenses



\*In 2018 VM Kenya support includes pastoral salary and VMC missions trip to Kenya.

# News & Events

## Apprenticing in the Ways of Jesus

In place of our national consultation Thinking Shrewdly, this spring VMC is hosting a series of one-day conferences in six regions across Canada. Our featured speaker, Matt Pamplin\* (pastor, lecturer and church planter) will explore the true essence of disciple-making, its critical role in church vitality, mission and multiplication. Matt will introduce frameworks and practices that church leaders can use to make disciples and establish a discipleship culture in the local church.



While the event is open to everyone, we hope that a group of elders, staff, ministry leaders and other congregational influencers from your church will attend together. Connect with other leaders from our network. Be inspired by stories of mission and gospel transformation. Hear the latest developments at VMC and return home with a fresh understanding of disciple-making.

March 30	Mount Carmel Bible College	Edmonton, AB
April 6	Granville Chapel	Vancouver, BC*
April 13	Don Valley Bible Chapel	Toronto, ON
April 27	Lincoln Road Chapel	Waterloo, ON
May 11	Westview Bible Church	Montreal, QC
May 25	Aurora Church	Halifax, NS

More info and REGISTER at [vision-ministries.org/resources/events/](http://vision-ministries.org/resources/events/)

\*Matt Pamplin will not be part of the Vancouver gathering. Featured speakers will be from the region.

## Farewells

Toward the end of 2018 we said farewell to Gary Allen and Al Rahamut—two members of VMC's outstanding staff team. Beginning in July 2012, Gary was our payroll and accounting specialist, serving the VMC network for nearly 6.5 years.

Al join VMC in November 2012, directing several aspects of operations: finance, HR, policy and procedures; and liaised with CRA, bank, legal and insurance representatives. After six years with VMC, Al retired (for good this time) in December.

Both will be missed deeply—for their expertise, professionalism, friendship and their faithfulness in following Jesus.

## Church Planting Canada Congress

October 22-24 | Montreal

Every two years, church planters and catalysts from across Canada, meet to learn from and encourage each other. In 2019, our national congress, "Momentum", gathers in both official languages in the heart of downtown Montreal.

Vision Ministries is hoping to bring a large cohort of church planters and leaders to this event. If you're interested, GET IN TOUCH (sooner than later), with Jay Gurnett at [jay.gurnett@vision-ministries.org](mailto:jay.gurnett@vision-ministries.org)

# LIVING GOD CHURCH: Young Church in Guelph Reaching Eritreans and Ethiopians

BY DOUG LOVEDAY

Pastor Mercy Tesfai is originally from Eritrea. Eritrea is a small country in East Africa bordered by Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti with 9 main ethnic groups making up the population of 5 million people. Mercy is from the largest group, the Tigrinyas. She speaks Tigrinya, as well as Amharic—the dominant language of neighbouring Ethiopia.

“In her language she has been reaching a lot of people,” says Mercy’s friend Esther Woldetensay. Esther, who is an evangelist and also from Eritrea, says, “I have seen the hand of God on Pastor Mercy. She encourages people and she gives them hope. She prays for the sick and they recover. God is really using her.”

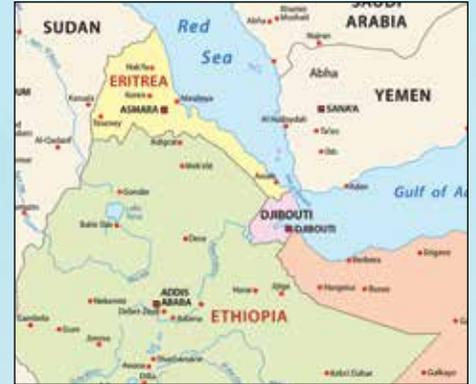
When the political situation worsened in Eritrea and persecution of Christians intensified, Mercy fled to Cairo, Egypt. Her two daughters joined her several years later. While in Cairo as a refugee, Mercy reached out to fellow Eritreans with great compassion. She was a part-time house cleaner while she worked alongside Pastor Ezra Gebrehiwot to start a church. In 2010

when Pastor Ezra left Egypt for Canada, he appointed Mercy as the senior pastor of the Cairo church. Ezra now leads Living God Church in Toronto.

In March 2014, Mercy came to Canada with her daughters and settled in Guelph, Ontario. By December of that year, she began meeting with a friend to pray for God’s Spirit to work among new Canadians from Eritrea and Ethiopia living in Guelph. Seven months later, they launched a second location of the Toronto Living God Church that now rents space from Guelph Bible Chapel. Each Sunday, approximately 40 people gather to worship God and hear the preaching of God’s word. About 150 people usually attend the church’s Christmas celebrations.

Esther and Mercy recently travelled on a ministry trip back to Cairo. Esther was touched by the love the people have for Pastor Mercy and her effectiveness among them. “They call her ‘mommy’ because of the compassion she showed them... She is an amazing woman.”

Like many New Canadian pastors, Mercy does not get paid for her ministry with the church. She works full time at



a factory to support her family and does the ministry on evenings and weekends. On Saturdays, Pastor Mercy and a team from her church usually tell people about Jesus at malls, on the street, and during hospital visits. Mercy has been known to buy groceries out of her own pocket and deliver them to newcomers to ensure they feel welcomed. “If Mercy had more time to focus on God’s work, she could do a lot of things,” says Esther. Pastor Mercy’s church belongs to a VMC-supported network of Ethiopian and Eritrean churches led by Pastor Yonatan Hiruy. ■

## The Church Life Cycle

...FROM COVER

vision steers and relationships navigate from the front seat, while programs and management play a supportive role in the back seat. In declining churches, management is often at the steering wheel with vision asleep in the backseat.

I recall a pivotal moment at ForestView, just as our church was emerging into adolescence. A staffing decision boiled down to whether we should hire for our internal needs or external mission. Our stated vision was all about reaching the community, but would we sacrifice our

preference for programs to bless those beyond our fellowship? Compelling vision ultimately influenced the decision to hire a Director of Community Outreach—a choice that resourced ministry among the marginalized, spiritually reshaped us, grew our congregation and sustained vitality.

Ironically members often feel the most satisfaction with their church experience in the maturity stage, even though vision has been fading since late adulthood. Congregational contentment allows church leaders to ignore the need to cultivate vision. It is critical to identify the loss of vision and intervene as early as possible.

The change required for revitalization in the later stages of the life-cycle takes longer and is usually more radical and invasive.

How critical is it to understand where your congregation lies on the church life-cycle? As organizational guru, Peter Drucker once said, “If you don’t know where you are, how will you know what to do?”

In the three issues of Thinking Ahead this year, we hope to feature stories of churches at critical junctures in the life cycle. In this issue we hear from new churches and discover the way vision and meaningful relationships are nurturing congregation life and momentum. ■

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# Keeping the Vision Alive

BY MIKE STONE

Since 1992, VMC has been inspired by a vision to see more and more people become committed followers of Jesus Christ. Convinced that the Church is the principal conduit through which God works out his redemptive purposes in this world, we focus our energy and resources on multiplying and revitalizing congregations. What began as an independent agency stirring up evangelistic activity in Ontario has grown into a national network of two hundred plus churches—collaborating in gospel mission across Canada and beyond.

But what now? Or even more crucial, “What’s next?”

I’ve often wondered how George Bullard’s church life-cycle model might apply to an organization like VMC. At twenty-seven years of age, VMC is in late stage adulthood and perhaps already into maturity. Maturity is the phase in which members (pastors & churches) experience the most satisfaction. Yet it is also the stage when vision may be silently fading away.

VMC’s founding vision has catalyzed incredible expansion and development through four life-cycle phases, from infancy to adulthood. But if Bullard is correct, fresh vision is required to ignite future growth and impact. VMC was launched when I was twenty-six years old, serving as an associate pastor within our then, nebulous constituency. An entire generation of church leaders have been stirred and sustained by the same vision for nearly three decades. As the next generation steps to the

helm, a new picture of the future is required to kindle passion for gospel transformation.

To prevent program and management from becoming the driving force at VMC, we will continue to give our best energy to the cultivation of relationship and vision. One of the main reasons we are hosting six regional conferences in place of our national conference this year is to deepen our relationship with church leaders (elders, deacons, ministry coordinators, etc.) beyond what we already enjoy with pastors, and to help these leaders connect with peers from other churches in their region.

This is also the year that we’re expanding the size and mandate of our Moving the Mission Forward (MMF) national partnership. We hope that primary leaders from as many as two dozen of our most vibrant and mission-minded churches, representing every geographic region, will gather annually as an advisory team to VMC. Our ability to cast compelling vision for our network is directly related to our capacity to discern well—listening to leaders from congregations that are experiencing the most transformative kingdom impact.

The essence of our desire to see more and more people become committed followers of Jesus Christ isn’t fading anytime soon. But how we imagine, express and pursue this vision will continue to evolve. Shifting contexts, emerging challenges and an incredibly innovative Holy Spirit leaves little room for business as usual. ■

## VMC Matching Fund Campaign

We are looking for a new generation of financial partners among those who long to see people, homes and communities transformed by the good news of Jesus. Please invest in church mission, planting, and revitalization to help make these hopes a reality!

A group of our friends have generously provided pledges and gifts towards a matching fund to inspire new sources of generosity\*. With this fund we will be able to match all “new giving” until the end of 2019. Double the value of your donation!

### Please pray:

- That more friends will provide large gifts toward our matching fund. We are asking God to establish a matching fund of \$240,000 by the end of 2019.
- For \$240,000 new gifts from first time partners or existing partners who increase their regular support in 2019.

Ask God about becoming a new financial partner or increasing your current support. Your gift will be matched dollar for dollar—doubling your impact for God’s kingdom through Vision Ministries.

**Please send your gift  
in the envelope provided  
inside this newsletter.**

### Questions?

Contact Mike Stone at 226-268-8354

\*New giving= Gifts from those who have not previously given to VMC (or have not done so for many years). Or increased giving from those who regularly support VMC.

## THINKING AHEAD



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